



Does International Child Sponsorship Work?



Executive Summary of the Wydick Research Document

In 2008, Dr. Bruce Wydick, a professor of Economics and International Studies at the University of San Francisco, along with two colleagues, set out to explore the impact of international child sponsorship. Realizing that almost no such research had ever been published, Wydick envisioned a comparative look at several child sponsorship organizations. However, only one child sponsorship organization accepted the invitation to participate in the study: Compassion International. So, rather than comparing sponsorship programs of separate organizations, Wydick's research team focused exclusively on researching the adult life outcomes of Compassion's formerly sponsored children against the outcomes of children who were not part of the ministry's programs.

The research focused on six nations (Bolivia, Guatemala, India, Kenya, the Philippines and Uganda) where Compassion provided child sponsorship between 1980 and 1992. That time period was chosen because children enrolled in Compassion's sponsorship program during that time frame would be adults by the time the research was conducted between 2008 and 2010. 1,860 formerly sponsored children were interviewed. For control-group purposes, the team also studied non-sponsored siblings, other non-sponsored children in their communities, and children in outlying communities where Compassion's program wasn't offered. In all, data was collected on more than 10,000 individuals. The objective was to compare the life outcomes of children who were supported through Compassion's program to the life outcomes of those who were not.

The results, to be published in the April 2013 issue of the prestigious *Journal of Political Economy*, demonstrate "large and statistically significant positive impacts from child sponsorship on years of completed schooling, primary, secondary and tertiary school completion, and on the probability and quality of adult employment."

The Findings



EDUCATION

The research found that children formerly sponsored through Compassion stayed in school longer than their non-sponsored peers.

Former Compassion-sponsored children:

- stayed in school 1 to 1.5 years longer than their non-sponsored peers. (In Uganda, the average was 2.4 years longer.)
- were up to 13.3 percent more likely to finish primary school than their non-sponsored peers.
- were 27 to 40 percent more likely to finish secondary education than those who were not enrolled in the Child Sponsorship Program.
- were 50 to 80 percent more likely to complete a university education than non-sponsored children.

When formerly sponsored Compassion children were asked which component of Compassion's program was most beneficial, the most common answer was "educational support" (38.5 percent). The second-most common response related to "spiritual or character development" (29.4 percent).



EMPLOYMENT

The research found that children formerly sponsored through Compassion were more likely to have salaried/white-collar jobs as adults than their non-sponsored peers.

Former Compassion-sponsored children:

- were, as adults, 14 to 18 percent more likely to have salaried employment than those who had not been part of the program.

- were, as adults, roughly 35 percent more likely to secure white-collar employment than their non-sponsored peers.



LEADERSHIP

The research found that children formerly sponsored through Compassion were more likely to become leaders in their communities and churches.

Former Compassion-sponsored children:

- were, as adults, 30 to 75 percent more likely to become community leaders than their non-sponsored peers.
- were, as adults, 40 to 70 percent more likely to become church leaders than their non-sponsored peers.
- Were, as adults, 63 percent more likely to become teachers than their non-sponsored peers.

“The Great Equalizer”

Dr. Wydick refers to Compassion’s Child Sponsorship Program as “the great equalizer” in that it levels the playing field for children seeking an education in the developing world. In countries where there is a greater need or where children face greater obstacles to achieving an education, Compassion tends to have a greater impact.

Dr. Wydick also expresses his astonishment that, until now, almost no in-depth research has been conducted in the field of child sponsorship. “Given the number of individuals involved in child sponsorship relationships and the billions of dollars committed to them,” he says, “it is surprising that almost no research exists that evaluates the impact of these programs.”

Self-esteem Studies

In addition to the above research, Dr. Wydick’s team conducted three follow-up studies — in Bolivia, Kenya and Indonesia. These studies, however, are not part of the article to be published in the *Journal of Political Economy*. The purpose of these ancillary studies was to “investigate whether adult life outcomes may have been shaped by Compassion’s program focus on developing self-

esteem and nurturing aspirations during childhood.” It is important to note that these follow-up studies will go through a separate peer-review process and may be published at a later date.

Unlike the published study, the three follow-up studies focused on children who are *currently* sponsored through Compassion. The studies found that, in each of the countries, current Compassion-sponsored children had a higher expectation of education-level attainment as well as a higher expectation of the type of employment they would have in the future. The Indonesia study also used a psychological drawing test to measure hopefulness and self-esteem. That study found that Compassion-sponsored children were more hopeful and had a higher level of self-esteem than their non-sponsored counterparts.

Researchers concluded the ancillary study portion of the research document by admitting, “While further work is required to establish a causal link between aspirations and adult life outcomes, the possibility that nurturing aspirations can have important effects on economic development has intriguing implications.”

Summation

This study is the first of its kind. It is independent, empirical research conducted by researchers from the University of San Francisco, University of Minnesota and University of Washington. The study concludes that the benefits for children who were enrolled in Compassion’s Child Sponsorship Program in these six countries from 1980 to 1992 were measurable and provided large and statistically significant increases in the areas of education, employment and leadership.

This means sponsored children were more likely than their non-sponsored counterparts to complete primary, secondary and tertiary education. As adults, they were more likely to be salaried employees, more likely to have white-collar jobs and more likely to be community leaders.

Three follow-up studies are also mentioned in the paper but they will be mentioned only briefly in the published study in the *Journal of Political Economy*. Those studies found that children currently sponsored in three countries (Bolivia, Kenya and Indonesia) scored higher on self-esteem tests and had higher aspirations for their educational and employment futures. More in-depth details of these follow-up studies may be published at a later date.

It should be noted that Compassion’s program has expanded and matured since the time period that was studied. This further development of our curriculum and holistic child development approach offers Compassion’s sponsored children even more development and nurturing opportunities.